

Flow spike
experiment

Institutional Knowledge
Campaign

Third CLDP
cohort

Hearing
safety

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WESTERN AREA POWER ADMINISTRATION

SEPTEMBER 2021

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CLOSED Circuit

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Editor: PHILIP REED

Graphic Designer: DANIELLE ORR

Do you have an idea for a story?
Contact reed@wapa.gov



**Western Area
Power Administration**

WESTERN AREA POWER ADMINISTRATION
P.O. Box 281213
Lakewood, CO 80228-8213
720.962.7050
www.wapa.gov | publicaffairs@wapa.gov

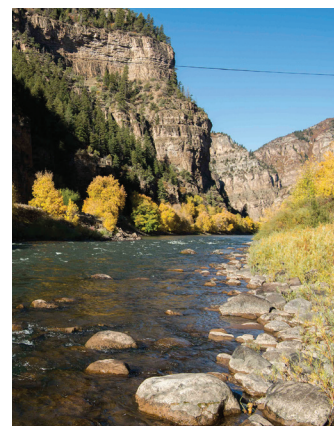
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Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Experiment takes aim at smallmouth bass | 1 |
| <i>Non-native smallmouth bass threaten the Upper Colorado River Basin.</i> | |
| RM manager shares 30-year journey to WAPA | 4 |
| <i>Rocky Mountain's new regional manager has known about WAPA for decades.</i> | |
| CFO, KM team up to improve knowledge | 6 |
| <i>The Institutional Knowledge Campaign helps Finance enhance processes.</i> | |
| Third CLDP cohort underway | 8 |
| <i>WAPA's two-year Craft Leadership Development Program kicks off.</i> | |
| Human Performance enhances safety culture | 10 |
| <i>What is Human Performance? What does it mean for you?</i> | |
| Opening our eyes to DEI | 12 |
| <i>Sarah Pritchett shares her experience with diversity, equity and inclusion.</i> | |
| Listen up: Protect your hearing | 14 |
| <i>Noise is all around. Learn what you can do to protect your ears.</i> | |
| Rapid Recaps | 16 |
| • UGP flies high for line maintenance | |
| Brief Transmissions | 17 |
| • Masks required at WAPA facilities | |
| • Administrative leave available for family vaccinations | |
| • WITCC Chat hours extended | |
| • Strategy shares TAP videos | |

On the cover

The Colorado River is under threat from non-native fish, but biologists are determined to solve the problem. Read about their experiments on Page 1.
(Photo by **Alexander Stephens.**)





Experiment takes aim at smallmouth bass

By Eric Barendsen

Photos courtesy of Kevin Bestgen

Invasive fishes and woody plants. Declining Colorado pikeminnow numbers. Struggling razorback sucker larvae. These challenges, not to mention longstanding drought conditions in the region, have added stress to the Colorado River and Green River ecosystems in recent decades.

continued on Page 2

Ecologists use electrofishing to reduce the smallmouth bass population just downstream from Winnie's Rapid in the Green River.



Photos taken at the same location before and during the June flow spike illustrate the significant temperature, depth and velocity changes measured by researchers.

In particular, non-native smallmouth bass pose an existential threat to native fish throughout the Upper Colorado River Basin.

"They're highly predaceous, so they eat lots of endangered native fish," said Fish Biologist **Derek Fryer**. "They reproduce and become established, and they're very hard to get rid of."

He compared smallmouth bass to weeds in a garden in the way they compete for resources.

"We're continually weeding the smallmouth bass to try to keep their numbers down," he explained.

"The big predator in the system, pikeminnow, evolved to eat some of these other native fish and doesn't have a large gape," Fish Biologist **Shane Capron** said. "Smallmouth bass have quite a large gape to be able to swallow large fish compared to their body size. They're a unique predator in our system, to be able to chomp on our fish and not have any big fish out there to take care of them."

Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program ecologists on the Green River in northeastern Utah are taking a holistic approach to the

problem. They believe that disrupting the reproductive cycles of smallmouth bass through well-timed, short, abrupt increases in river flow could hold one key in their quest.

"The whole goal here is generally to wipe out or disrupt as much of that smallmouth bass spawning as possible," Fryer said. The larger they get, he explained, the more native fish they eat. "The idea is to lessen the number of fish that are available to grow into adulthood and become big predators."

A 2018 report authored by Colorado State University scientist Kevin Bestgen proposed taking that approach to disadvantaging bass in the Green River. The study recommended using an early summer, cold-water high-flow spike from Flaming Gorge Dam.

While preparing for the flow spike, ecologists have continued to reduce smallmouth bass through electrofishing—electrically charging the water to temporarily stun the fish and removing as many adults as possible. States also encourage or require recreationists to remove them when fishing.

When new introduction locations are found, the program targets them

to discourage new populations from becoming established.

The program also funds the construction of screens to limit movement of non-native fish between ponds, reservoirs and rivers with endangered fish habitat.

"It's kind of an all-hands-on-deck scenario," Capron said. "This flow spike is another thing we can do to further that impact. We're trying to break the back of the reproduction cycle, and it's a really hard thing to do."

Powerful partners

Before the study, WAPA recruited experts from Argonne National Laboratory to help gauge whether or not the maximum "power plant" flow of 4,600 cubic feet per second could provide the conditions for a successful experiment.

The goal was to use all of the high flow to generate electricity, rather than running some of the water through a bypass to create faster flows. That kept the costs down for WAPA's customers and ensured that all of the water produced power.

"We worked with Argonne and developed this feasibility project, and the evaluation came back that, 'yeah, we can get some pretty good flows and water levels in these side channels. We think this will be a good experiment and worth doing just with power plant,'" Capron said.

WAPA worked closely with the Bureau of Reclamation to pattern the ramp up and down to maximize power value.

Collaborating with Reclamation, WAPA seeks to offset the cost of the experiment through additional water releases and energy sales from Flaming Gorge Dam during summer and fall.

First spike, ask questions later

In June, WAPA, CSU, Reclamation and other partners in the Endangered Fish Recovery Program conducted the first flow spike targeting smallmouth bass eggs and larvae.

The experiment sought to hobble the invasive bass' advantage over native fish such as the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker. Scientists timed the study to occur before pikeminnow larvae arrive in the Green River from upstream spawning grounds on the Yampa River.

"The spawns are very closely timed, but there is enough separation there that the program thought it was safe to conduct the study," Fryer explained.

From 12 p.m. on June 21 to 4 p.m. on June 24, Reclamation rapidly ramped up flow at Flaming Gorge from about 860 cfs to 4,600 cfs. This surge increased the river's depth by three feet in many locations and dramatically increased flow velocities.

Cold water from Flaming Gorge Reservoir plunged the temperature of the river from around 70 degrees to about 60 degrees.

"That cold shock, in addition to the high flows, could discourage them from spawning and cause them to abandon the effort," Fryer said.

Slowing the spread

Smallmouth bass rapidly expanded in the Upper Basin in the early-to-mid 2000s, and their numbers continue to grow.

The adult male guards the nest. Because they are poor swimmers and susceptible to predation, larvae and newly hatched fish stay nearby. But the high flow may disrupt the spawning process, get the male to abandon the nest and sweep the eggs and larvae downriver to be preyed upon.

Flushing colder water downriver may also help by confusing the bass' natural temperature cues to spawn.

Scientists believe that timing the flow spike to occur in the middle-to-later portions of the spawning period will have the maximum effect. Bass can still lay eggs after the flow spike, but late-season spawners produce late young, which have a harder time surviving winter.

Drought

While higher-flow years naturally limit bass reproduction, low-flow years provide conditions favorable to spawning, growth and survival. With continuing drought in the West, the past few years have provided favorable habitat conditions for reproduction.

"That's why the program pushed really hard to get this flow spike this year, because we're in such a drought right now with such low flows," explained Capron. "The potential effect was much bigger and more important this year."

The program sees the driest years as the best for impacting bass, but those are also the most challenging years for WAPA.

"Even though we support the Endangered Fish Recovery Program, these are very difficult years for us to release that kind of water," Fryer said.

Data capture and early indicators

CSU scientists developed the study plan, determined the timing of the flow spike and headed into the field to collect data.

Prior to the water release, they sampled 19 sites in Lodore Canyon and Whirlpool Park for connecting flows and physical habitat. The researchers gathered data on habitat characteristics including temperature, depth and velocity.

During the flow spike, they resampled those 19 locations for physical habitat characteristics, plus some limited biological sampling, such as

collecting bass larvae in drift nets. If young bass are found in drift nets, it indicates that the young are being swept from the nest and that the experiment is having the desired effect.

In July and September, the team is revisiting those locations and collecting biological data to measure larval and juvenile smallmouth bass abundance, which will be compared to prior years' estimates.

Early indications show that the effects varied by site but, overall, they look positive in many locations. Time-lapse photos captured the high flows inundating spawning habitats. The data shows approximately three-foot depth increases at many locations with fairly high velocity water flowing through them.

"I'm not sure how big of a system-wide effect we are going to have," Fryer said. "I think the potential is there."

"How far downriver this flow is going to be effective is a real question," Capron said. "You're trying to do something with a relatively small flow, and we'll see. It could be really effective. It's hard to gauge, but worth trying."

Future programming

Enhancing recovery of native fishes and mitigating the impact of invasive smallmouth bass remains the overarching goal in Green River ecosystem management.

Going forward, program stakeholders, including WAPA, Reclamation, Fish and Wildlife, the Park Service and the Upper Basin states, will continue to meet several times per year to develop workplans. Together, they set the agenda for future scientific studies, review the progress of removal efforts and prioritize screening locations.

WAPA's Colorado River Storage Project Management Center will continue to protect native fish while preserving hydropower.

"It's really critical for us to recover these species," Capron said. "But also, in the future, to be able to remove restrictions that limit the capacity and energy we produce because of protections for endangered species." □

Note: Barendsen is a public affairs specialist.

RM manager shares 30-year journey to WAPA

On Aug. 1, WAPA welcomed **Bart Barnhart** as senior vice president and Rocky Mountain regional manager. Prior to this, he served as deputy assistant secretary at the Department of Energy, where he provided executive leadership and directed the management and operation of America's Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

His journey to WAPA ended up being one that was 30 years in the making.

Barnhart spent 34 years in the U.S. Air Force, ultimately achieving the rank of colonel. In 1990, while stationed at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, he had his first experience with WAPA.

"I was the base utilities engineer," he said. "I was in charge of certifying the utility bills that we got. Someone came up with the idea that we could buy power from different sources out there! I was young and I was not familiar with that sort of thing yet."

His colleague suggested WAPA, and that was the first time that Barnhart heard of the organization.

"I learned about WAPA through the negotiation process," explained Barnhart. "We negotiated a power purchase deal and Public Service Company of Colorado, the local utility in the Denver area, wheeled the power to us."



Afterward, he became more familiar with the organization and its role in powering the West.

"I learned that, in addition to marketing power, WAPA maintained actual transmission lines, and that was really interesting to me," he said. "Ever since then, I've always wanted to be part of that piece of the industry."

The affinity that he felt for power marketing and transmission went hand in hand with his role at Lowry.

"One of the engineer squadron's primary jobs was to keep the lights on," he summarized. "So, I've been around the power business at the distribution end, and I wanted to get more into the business when I retired from the Air Force. My career path led me in a different direction, though, before the opportunity presented itself."

His career took him to the Department of Energy, which he joined in 2015 as a member of the Senior Executive Service in the Office of Environmental Management.

"I was involved with the budget for a while, and I worked on decommissioning nuclear facilities," said Barnhart. "Some of them went all the way back to the Manhattan Project. When it comes to nuclear facilities, you can't just knock them down. You need to be cautious and decontaminate them. It's very involved."

His work was interesting, but he was eventually reminded of an earlier ambition.

"At the time, I didn't know that the power marketing administrations were under the DOE," he said. "Then one day I realized WAPA was part of the DOE and thought, 'Look at that! That's part of the Office of Electricity.' It rekindled the interest that I had 30 years earlier."

From then on, he kept an eye out for relevant opportunities at WAPA. With his Air Force experience – as well as his status as a licensed professional engineer, a project management professional and a certified facility manager – he wanted to make sure he could find the right fit for his background.

"The RM regional manager position opened up, and that dream kind of came back to me again," he said. "I figured, why not finally give it a shot?"

The application process and interview went well enough that Administrator and CEO **Tracey LeBeau** had some good news for him.

"You could have knocked me over with a feather when Tracey called me and invited me to come to work," he said. "I'm actually part of WAPA now, and that's been in the back of my mind since 1990. We've come full circle after 30 years!"

As SVP and RM regional manager, Barnhart is excited to work in the industry, get to know the people involved and learn more about power marketing.

"Power marketing is the really interesting thing to me," he said. "In the Air Force I learned a lot about maintenance and engineering. I don't take them for granted and I know I will have a lot to

learn about how they work at WAPA specifically, but I can speak those languages. But power marketing, rate setting, interacting with customers, all of that is new to me. It's a little mysterious right now, but I'm very interested in it. I can't wait to learn that part of the business."

Barnhart knows that WAPA's complexity means that it will be a while before he truly masters the intricacies of his region. He also knows that it will require many meetings and collaborations with customers and members of his staff.

"It won't be something I pick up next week," he said, "but I'm excited to do it."

Specifically, he is looking forward to serving as a permanent fixture of leadership, following the two acting regional managers who preceded him. He praised Vice President of Transmission System Asset Management for Desert Southwest **Jack Murray** and Senior Vice President and Colorado River Storage Project Manager **Tim Vigil** for their work in this capacity.

"They've done an outstanding job," he said. "But I think the staff will be happy to have the stability. I want to accomplish getting them comfortable with me and making RM a place where people want to come to work and are proud of it. If we can accomplish that for the staff, we will have really done something great."

Of course, he's not only looking forward to professional development; in his new location, Barnhart will have an opportunity to explore his personal hobbies.

"My office in Loveland is right next to two of the things that I'm interested in," he said. "I'm a private pilot, but I haven't flown in a few years. Now that I'm right next to an airport, I'll be able to do that quite a bit easier than in the D.C. area. Also, I've been riding Harley-Davidsons since 1990, and riding motorcycles since I was 15 years old. There's a Harley-Davidson shop right near the office as well. Those are the things I like to do the most, so I think it's a good location!"

In closing, he emphasized his commitment to safety.

"I am very much focused on the safety of our people," he said. "I am trained as an electrical engineer. I know that you don't get a second chance in the high-voltage business. Here, we need to get safety right, first time every time."

He continued, discussing his appreciation for WAPA's culture of safety.

"It's not just the linemen on poles and towers," he said. "It's a mindset in everything we do that needs to be pushed from the top, and it takes continual effort on the part of the Safety staff. I look forward to working with them to keep that mindset out there and get folks thinking about that. We need to take care of each other and do things smartly, and make sure that we all come back to work tomorrow. That safety focus is a good piece of who I am, and I will continue that here." □

CFO, KM team up to improve knowledge

By Amy Kesler



“I now myself,” said Socrates. At WAPA, this is at the heart of the Institutional Knowledge Campaign, a collaboration begun in 2020 between the Office of the Chief Financial Officer and the Knowledge Management program.

Extending through all areas of the OCFO, the IKC combines video and myWAPA content, enabling employees to record, access and continuously improve their knowledge of tasks, processes and workflows.

“The objective of the OCFO’s Institutional Knowledge Campaign is to capture and codify the multitude of operating processes and procedures within our department to enhance operating efficiencies as well as the training and development of our team,” explained Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer **Michael Peterson**.

He went on to emphasize that the IKC is a “bottom-up campaign” targeting “best-practice, line-level functions” as established by his team. In the long term, he expects the project to “support planning, execution and oversight of operations departmentwide.”

The IKC originated in 2020, when Financial Operations, headed by Supervisory Financial Analyst **Neilia Abban**, collaborated with Technical Writer John Flynt and the KM program to make videos comprehensively tracking Accounts Payable workflows.

The result was a set of around 50 videos that have served as standards for process improvement and onboarding. Abban explained in her description of the effort that training of this type was estimated to require around nine months. The videos reduced this time to a little more than one month.

This outcome led to an Inclusion, Innovation and Technology Award and served as justification for expanding the effort to include all areas of the OCFO. First steps in this expansion were led by Supervisory Financial Analyst **Gynette Uhl** and content editing feedback is being provided by the OCFO’s administrative assistant, Secretary **Maureen Toglia**.

This initiative has expanded into WAPA’s regions as well, with Upper Great Plains being an early contributor.

The current libraries contain more than 100 workflow procedural videos across functional areas within the OCFO. With the involvement of Supervisory Accountant **Justin Borsheim**, Comptroller **David Barnes**, Vice President of Governance and Policy **Lisa Hansen** and Financial

Manager **Colin Marquez**, the effort is expected to move forward and trace all primary workflows, standardizing OCFO activities across WAPA.

“This project leverages simplicity and accessibility we’ve all taken for granted on popular social media platforms like YouTube, and demonstrates how those same benefits carry over into today’s workplace,” said Marquez.

He explained that, in addition to onboarding, the IKC initiative provides a way to “streamline training for new processes or maintain consistency for existing processes.”

Software users outside the OCFO also benefit from IKC videos. Support videos for Concur travel processes are available on the Travel page of myWAPA. When travel resumes following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, employees WAPA-wide will benefit from the reminders and guidance

To view these videos, visit **myWAPA, Employee Resources, Travel**



available in these videos.

The Financial Systems team created videos that support upgrades to the Financial Information Management System, providing friendly introductions to the new functionality. There are also videos available for ATAAPS, familiar to many as the backbone of WAPA timekeeping. Other supported

applications include the Invoice Processing Platform interface and the Business Objects Explorer.

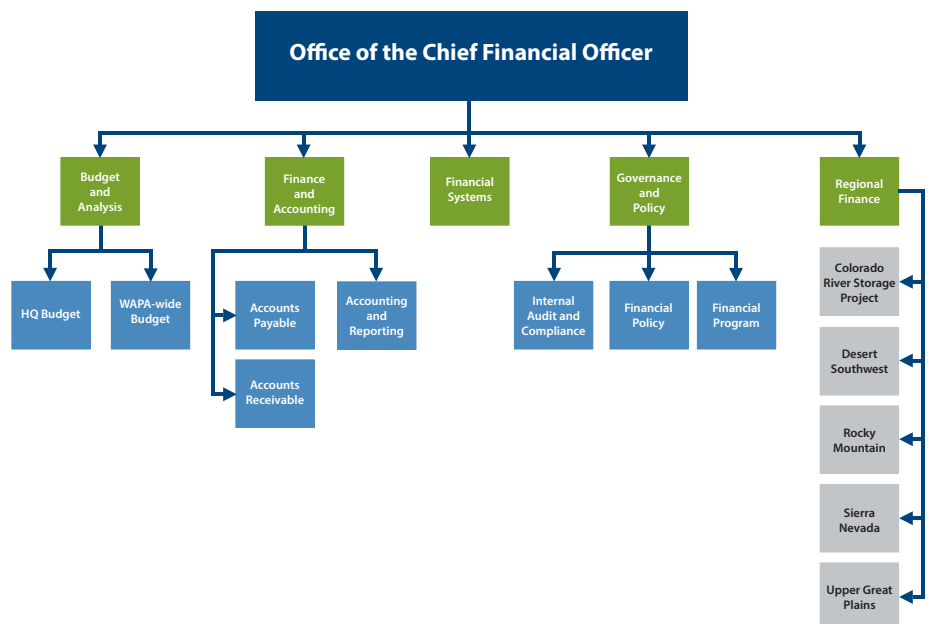
In addition to covering essential workflows, the IKC accelerates automation initiatives by providing a ready-made and detailed roadmap of key processes and procedures. Automation – also known as robotics – enables team members to focus on higher-value functions by systematizing routine processes.

Major steps toward implementing automation involve examining existing desk guides, identifying business rules and decision points and evaluating the complexity of information to be processed. IKC’s KM videos are ideal for this work because they comprehensively capture process information in one pass, making it easy for the robotics project team to study processes, significantly reducing the time required for development.

More videos are added each week. Serving as mentors for the processes that they own, more than 50 OCFO participants in total are expected to contribute.

After the library is fully developed, videos will be tracked using a comprehensive data scheme that KM has established, ensuring that reliable help is within easy reach of employees. □

Note: Kesler is a fiscal specialist. John Flynt contributed to this story.



Third CLDP cohort underway

T

he third cohort of WAPA's two-year Craft Leadership Development Program is underway. Originally

established in 2016, the CLDP provides the organization's craft employees with an opportunity to grow professionally and prepare themselves for future advancement.



The CLDP is designed to allow its participants to reach beyond the scope of their everyday jobs. It assists them in developing the leadership traits and skill sets they will need for the next step in their careers. Through the duration of the program, participants continue to work in their current positions, performing their primary job responsibilities.

All permanent, non-supervisory, journeyman-level craft employees were invited to apply. Twelve participants were selected from the pool of qualified applicants, each of whom had different reasons for applying.

"I am looking forward to meeting new people and resources throughout WAPA," said Electronic Integrated Systems Mechanic **Ryley Thill**. "I am also excited to learn new leadership skills as well as gathering tools that will help me be successful in the future, whether it's in a leadership role or technical role."

Some of the participants are eager to understand WAPA more completely.

"I am interested in getting a broader view of WAPA, from both a personnel and operational perspective," said Electronic Integrated Systems Mechanic **Richard Rowens**. "I am also very optimistic about the training opportunities, both in general leadership as well as technical training. In the end of this, my goal would be to have the confidence of my leadership and peers with regards to me being a future leader."

One common refrain was an eagerness to expand their knowledge of different programs and departments.

"It will be great to be exposed to the different areas in WAPA, so that I may improve my knowledge of our business areas," said High Voltage Electrician **Dusty Hawkins**. "I look forward to making connections throughout WAPA, and receiving training and practice with different communication and leadership techniques."

"I hope that with being in the CLDP, I learn more about departments other than mine and why things are done the way they are," added High Voltage Electrician **Steven Smith**. "It will also



I am interested in getting a broader view of WAPA, from both a personnel and operational perspective.



"This is a great opportunity for personal growth," said High Voltage Electrician **Duane Wahlstrom**. "I hope to improve my skills to better do my job."

"I look forward to the professional development coursework and the opportunity to work on the capstone project," said High Voltage Electrician

Aron Brouillette. "It will be beneficial to learn how to contribute to improving the organization and processes where change is warranted."

He concluded by reflecting on the possibilities ahead.

"The mentors, committee members, sponsors and other participants in the program have an enormous amount of knowledge, information and experiences," he said. "It will be a pleasure to work with and learn from them." □

be helpful to have access to a mentor who will help me grow as a leader and the opportunity to meet and network with other people from different regions."

Smith was not alone in recognizing the value of mentors.

"I am looking forward to the mentorship opportunities the program has to offer," said Electronic Integrated Systems Mechanic **Nathan Harris**.

Still others set their sights on the work ahead – positively so, knowing how much they stood to gain professionally from the program.

| CLDP participant | Role | Region |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Aron Brouillette | Electrician | Sierra Nevada |
| Humberto Felix | Electronic Equipment Craftsman | Desert Southwest |
| Nathanial Harris | Electronic Equipment Craftsman | Rocky Mountain |
| Dustin Hawkins | Electrician | Sierra Nevada |
| Justin Hitzman | Electrician | Desert Southwest |
| Paul Inman | Lineman | Upper Great Plains |
| James Leach | Electrician | Desert Southwest |
| Richard Rowens | Electronic Equipment Craftsman | Desert Southwest |
| Steven Smith | Electrician | Sierra Nevada |
| Ryley Thill | Meter and Relay | Rocky Mountain |
| Duane Wahlstrom | Electrician | Rocky Mountain |
| Johnathan Zub | Lineman | Rocky Mountain |



Human Performance enhances safety culture

As WAPA's Human Performance Improvement/Just Culture Program gains traction, Human Performance Program Manager **Krystall Valencia** is interested in better educating employees on how the program benefits them.

HPI/JC is poised to offer significant benefit to WAPA; the first step is helping people to understand what it is.

"HPI allows employees at all levels to catch errors while performing their jobs, before they can cause harm to people, property and reliability," Valencia explained. "Right now, the HPI/JC Program's stakeholders are employees in Operations, Maintenance and Safety. The goal is to, as the program grows, include each organization throughout WAPA."

Understanding the program requires understanding the distinct but related concepts of Human Performance Improvement and Just Culture.

"HPI is a system that focuses on processes and procedures," Valencia said. "It focuses on organizational processes and values, job-site conditions, employee behaviors and leadership factors."

It is a methodology that looks at "the people side of processes and procedures impacting an organization's work," in other words. Explaining further, she revealed that she has a personal attachment to the concept.

"When something goes wrong, the program wants to look at what happened and figure out how to improve so that the error is not repeated," she said. "We must design our system in a way that makes it harder to make a mistake in the first place, while making it easier to perform work successfully. Several employees have shared with me in my current role that they left their previous organizations because they could be let go for making an honest human error."

A fear of retribution for simple mistakes – and, worse, the worry that employees will be fired for reporting them – does not result in a safe or efficient workplace. In fact, it's the precise opposite of Just Culture, which is the other half of Valencia's program.

Just Culture refers to an organization's system of commonly held values and beliefs – modeled by its leaders and internalized by its members – that influence the attitudes, choices and behaviors of the individuals of the organization. Within a Just Culture, when an error or other undesirable event occurs, employees and leadership are held accountable by focusing on systems and behavioral choices

rather than the fact that a mistake was made.

"In order for an organization to have Human Performance Improvement, Just Culture has to exist," said Valencia. "It's about having balanced accountability. HPI promotes employee excellence by reducing the frequency and severity of human errors. JC drives continuous improvement by examining and fixing system weaknesses that led to the error."

The program is aimed at making WAPA more resilient as an organization, with more effective and efficient employees, though Valencia knows that it will take some time and education in order to achieve this.

"Human Performance Improvement and Just Culture are not new concepts," she said. "What is new is our program and strategy to enhance these concepts at WAPA."

Valencia's vision is to support WAPA by providing employees with error reduction tools that will help them decrease the odds of making mistakes in the first place.

"Examples of these tools include the Six Basic Steps of Switching, three-part communication, Job Hazard Analysis and Stop Work Authority, among others," she said. "The three pillars that support HPI are prevention, detection

and correction of errors. We are taking WAPA to the next level and strengthening error prevention, detection and correction through increased information sharing of honest human errors and employee outreach."

She has already begun that outreach through an HPI survey. While Valencia is not yet ready to share her findings, she is happy to report that the results are promising.

"We had 279 employees who completed the survey, which is great for the first time," she said. "The survey revealed five areas of opportunity that I will focus on in these coming months."

She is also putting together training that will help employees understand the value of the program and how it works.

"The training will discuss the fundamentals of Human Performance Improvement and will be administered throughout the organization, from senior leadership to frontline employees and office personnel," said Valencia. "I encourage everybody who is available to attend. I think it will be eye opening."

In addition, she is working on turning the HPI/JC page on myWAPA into a valuable resource for the organization.

"My plan is for the program webpage to be a resource for employees to find information and tools that can be used," she said. "I also want to increase transparency and give employees a way to provide feedback."

Valencia emphasized that she does not want employees to think of the program as "a flavor of the month." She is dedicated to providing genuine improvement and change.

"WAPA has a new program and strategy aimed at enhancing Human Performance Improvement and Just Culture," she said. "That's an exciting thing. I hope employees recognize the value as well, and will attend training and help us achieve personal and organizational excellence." □

The five principles of Human Performance Improvement

- People are not perfect and even the best can make mistakes.
- Situations that lead to unplanned events are foreseeable, manageable and can be prevented.
- Organizational factors greatly influence individual behaviors. A large majority of unplanned events can be directly attributed to organizational factors.
- The use of positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviors helps individuals achieve higher levels of performance.
- A complete understanding of why past unplanned events happened can help prevent future occurrences.

Visit the HPI/JC intranet page at my.wapa.int/programs/Human-Performance

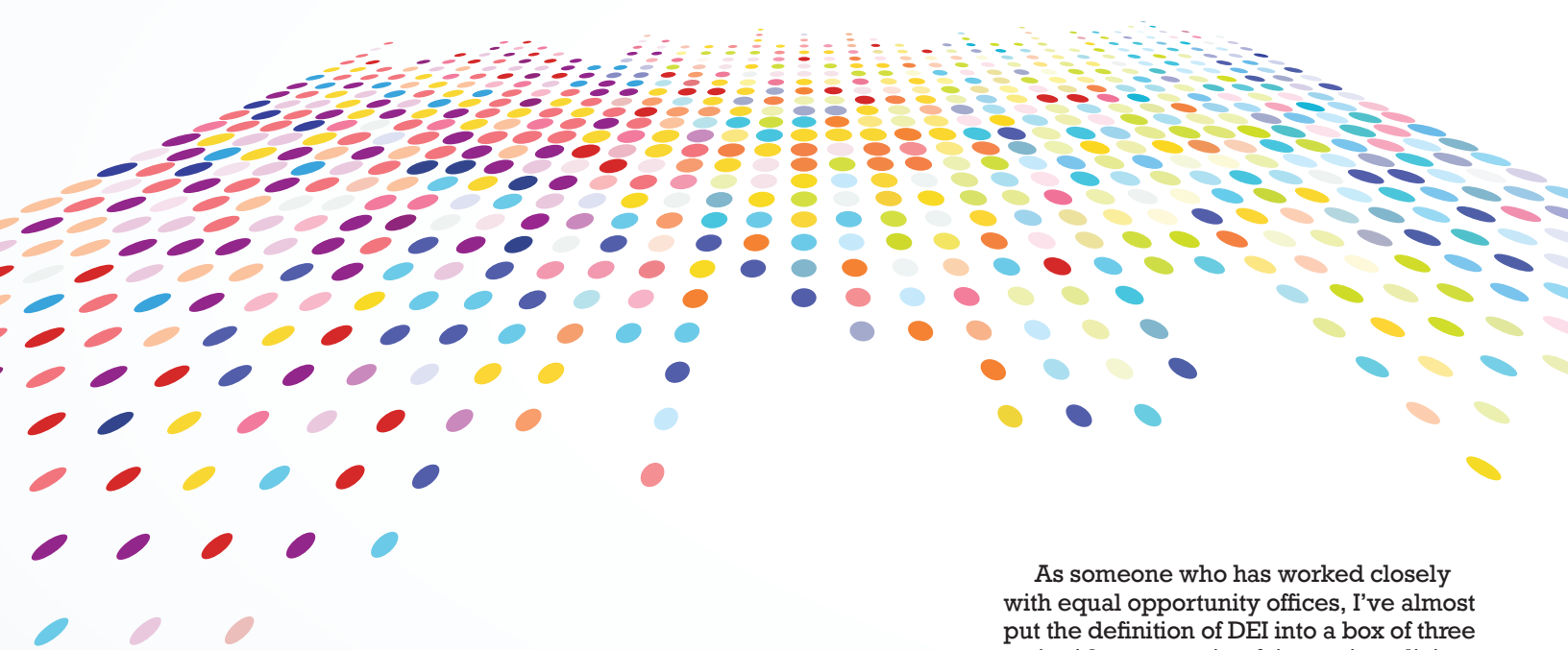


Note: Paul Robbins contributed to this story.



Opening our eyes to DEI

By Sarah Pritchett



DEI: diversity, equity and inclusion. We've heard these words often; they might just be the second most popular phrase this past year, next to "in these unprecedented times."

As someone who has worked closely with equal opportunity offices, I've almost put the definition of DEI into a box of three major ideas: ensuring fairness in policies and practices; ensuring universal access to appropriate resources and opportunities; and actively pursuing initiatives that show that the organization and its leaders value DEI.

Robert Sellers, the University of Michigan's chief diversity officer, has a great way to communicate DEI, comparing it to a party: Diversity is where everyone is invited to the party. Equity means that everyone gets to contribute to the playlist. Inclusion means that everyone has the opportunity to dance.

This is a very simple and clever way to differentiate DEI aspects, and

Equal Employment Manager **Charles Montañez** takes it a step further; more than inclusion being the opportunity to dance, he says, people should be asked to dance.

“When you see every seat empty and everyone dancing with everyone else, that is inclusion!” said Montañez.

Putting these words into practice can be complicated. How have we observed various organizations incorporating DEI initiatives? Perhaps you’ve seen diversity-centered hiring practices or communications on DEI topics – such as trainings and leadership bulletins – or perhaps you’ve seen a mentorship program aimed at creating a more inclusive culture.

These are all great ways to start the discussion and walk the walk. However, I’ve been able to appreciate and learn from various leaders what it truly takes to change an organization: specific and relevant education.

Earlier this year, Muslims celebrated the Islamic holidays of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr. I was pleasantly surprised to receive an email ahead of these holidays from the leader of a large organization. The email explained what the holidays were, who this may affect and how accommodations could be made for Muslims in the workplace, such as allowing flexible hours for fasting and prayer. It also included potential days off that Muslims might request to celebrate and sensitive practices during these holidays, such as avoiding holding a workplace lunch event.

More information can be found at hrzone.com/perform/people/ramadan-at-work-hr-best-practice

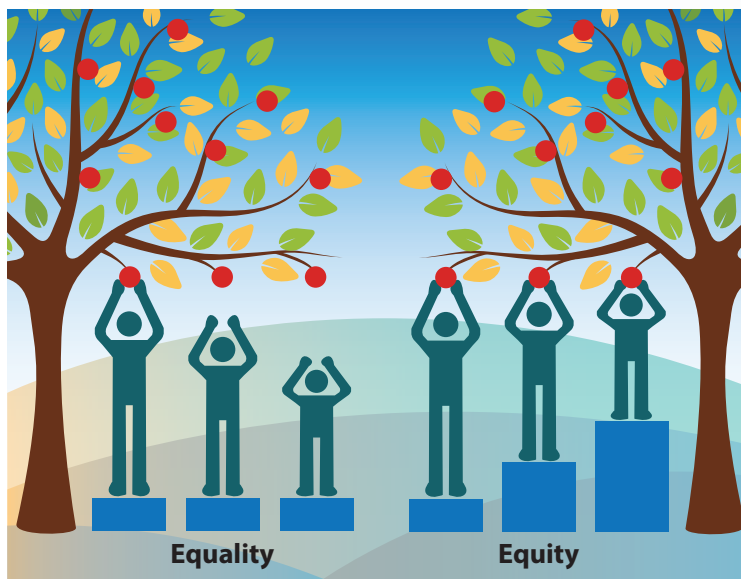


This was an incredible demonstration of leadership recognizing its part in promoting DEI principles. It is the

responsibility of all leaders, formal and informal, to recognize, communicate and practice the principles of DEI. In this case, a simple email conveyed a timely, applicable education opportunity.

A good, DEI-oriented leader challenges us to look around, learn from others and offer a helping hand to colleagues.

As someone who grew up learning about and observing these holidays



from childhood friends who celebrated them, I now look at Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and other holidays in a different light. I see opportunities to speak with Muslim employees about how their daily routine may change and what I can do to support them. I am able to use this as a platform for greater understanding of one another and improving team dynamics.

When I joined WAPA, I was invited to an amazing Employee Assistance Program class called Parenting During a Pandemic. As a result of the Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr email, I saw this as an opportunity to learn what my colleagues who have children might be facing that I otherwise wasn’t aware of.

We talked about the difficulties of childcare, seemingly awkward but necessary conversations for some parents around vaccination status and

attitudes of other families, the social and developmental limitations of virtual learning for children and more.

This pandemic hasn’t been easy for anyone, but seeing and hearing discussions and questions in this class contributed to my timely education of the additional considerations that my colleagues are making for their children.

There are opportunities abound that perhaps we haven’t seen as such regarding DEI. This might involve attending classes, receiving DEI-minded emails from leadership and, in my case, adding a special holiday calendar that accommodates multiple religions so that I can better understand, include and accommodate colleagues of different backgrounds.

I plan to walk the walk by pursuing and encouraging others to pursue these various opportunities. I will hopefully discover new ways to make others feel included.

It’s amazing how one email opened my eyes to so much more in the DEI realm around me. It

reminded me of an illustration of what equality may look like in an organization, and what equity should look like. DEI-minded communication encourages a “we’re in this together” outlook, and I truly believe that reinforcement of this idea starts with education, both formal and informal.

The Leadership Development Team, the Office of Economic Impact and Diversity and the Inclusion and Diversity Committee are working to integrate DEI into our daily routines. These groups are committed to bringing new and exciting DEI programs and timely, relevant training to all WAPA employees in the near future. Stay tuned for more information.

John Lennon said, “The more I see, the less I know for sure.” I like to think that that’s a good thing. □

Note: Pritchett is a leadership development specialist.



Noise is all around us: lawnmowers, sirens, loud earbuds, even the dishwasher. Sometimes it's easy to overlook the effect of noise on our hearing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "48 million people in the U.S. have trouble hearing with one or both of their ears." This is often the result of noise and lack of hearing protection.

The effect of noise on our hearing depends on two things: sound intensity and duration of exposure.

Sound intensity, or loudness, covers a broad spectrum and is measured in decibels. Exposure to 85 dB or more over time can lead to hearing loss, and you might be surprised at what level this is.

"If you need to raise your voice to be heard at arm's length, your noise exposure is probably above 85 dB," said Industrial Hygienist **Jeff Shelton**.

Duration refers to the length of exposure.

Hearing loss can happen as the result of a single loud noise, such as a firecracker exploding near the ear, but more often it results from repeated exposure to loud noises. The longer the exposure, the higher the risk of hearing loss.

This is not just limited to high noise levels; long periods of low-level exposure are just as hazardous as short periods of high noise levels.

Protect yourself

Whether you are listening to music, using power tools, mowing the lawn or attending a football game, your hearing can be affected. Fortunately, there are ways to protect yourself.

You can avoid loud places, turn down the volume and take periodic breaks to rest your ears. You can also reduce equipment noise by properly maintaining and replacing loose, worn or unbalanced parts. When you can't reduce noise exposure below 85 dB, wear hearing protection.

There are several types of low-cost and effective hearing protection. They do not block out noise entirely, but they reduce the sound level entering your ears. These devices have different noise reduction ratings that range from zero to 35 dB.

The type of protection you choose will depend on personal preference and comfort. Most importantly, you



must wear the protection correctly and consistently. Some of the most widely used protection devices are earplugs and earmuffs.

There are several types of earplugs. The formable plug is generally made of an expandable foam that fills the ear canal. Just roll the earplug between your fingers into a thin cylinder, then place it into the ear canal while pulling the top of the ear up and back with the opposite hand. The plug should slide right into the canal and begin to expand. If your voice sounds muffled, then the plug has a good seal.

Other devices include premolded plugs, made of a flexible material with fixed proportions, and custom molded plugs, made specially to fit the shape and size of the individual's ear canal.

Canal caps – earplugs on a flexible band that hang around the neck when not in use – work well for intermittent use.

Earmuffs block out noise by covering the ear entirely. They come in many designs and fit most people. Specialty earmuffs even have electronic components that can block out background noise and sound impulses.

If you have a beard, sideburns or glasses, they may cause earmuffs to not be as effective because they create a gap between your head and the earmuff cushion, allowing more noise to get through.

For added protection, earplugs and earmuffs worn together can reduce noise more effectively. As an example, recreational target shooters face exposures up to 175 dB and should consider wearing earmuffs together with earplugs.

Measure the level

A sound level meter can help you measure sound and be aware of noise levels around you. These can be purchased from safety suppliers or some hardware stores.

There are also sound level meter applications for smartphones, which display noise levels and provide information on hearing-loss risk. Understand, however, that these applications must be calibrated in order to be accurate.

Whether you are working in the yard, walking downtown or just sitting around the house, be aware of the sounds around you and your exposure to noise. Remember to protect your hearing. □

Note: Robbins is a technical writer who works under the Cherokee Nation Strategic Programs contract.

To learn more about hearing loss and protecting yourself from noise, visit cdc.gov/nceh/hearing_loss. An interactive hearing loss infographic is available at cdc.gov/nceh/hearing_loss/infographic



UGP flies high for line maintenance

By Paul Robbins

Photos by Bill Weekley

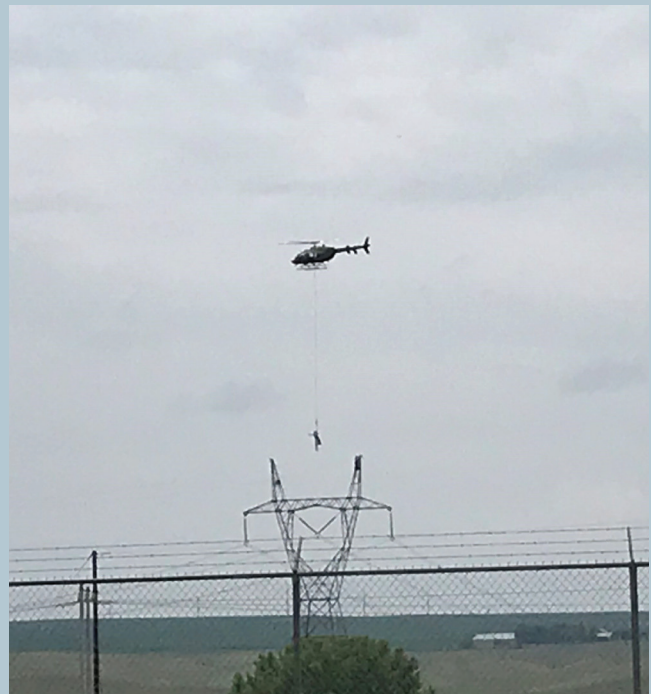
In mid-July, Upper Great plains line crews performed maintenance on 115-kilovolt lines in South Dakota, choosing to use helicopter operations instead of bucket trucks. Crews from Watertown, Armour and Sioux City, South Dakota, as well as from Fargo, North Dakota, all met together in Watertown for the project.

They started the week off with a Job Hazard Analysis briefing that addressed project-specific hazards and related prevention strategies. The JHA was followed by a review of the *Power System Maintenance Manual*, "Chapter 19: Human External Cargo," as required for both initial and refresher training. It included a review of equipment to be used, communication protocols and rescue and emergency procedures.

After the training, the crews performed mid-span repair, installing armor rod on fiber-optic lines and new line marker devices. These jobs were conducted from air chairs with transfer between structures using long lines.

The benefits of helicopter operations as compared to bucket trucks include crews covering more ground quickly and preventing damage to cropland surrounding the work areas.

Note: Robbins is a technical writer who works under the Cherokee Nation Strategic Programs contract.





Masks required at WAPA facilities

All WAPA federal employees, contractors and visitors are required to wear masks inside all WAPA facilities and vehicles, regardless of vaccination status and community transmission rate.

WAPA has adopted a more stringent posture regarding masks than the Department of Energy, which allows offices to forego masks in areas with low or moderate community transmission. WAPA requires masks in all locations.

There are a few exceptions to this requirement, including:

- While working alone in an office, substation control room, communication building or warehouse with floor-to-ceiling walls and a closed door.
- While operating a motor vehicle with no passengers.
- When eating/drinking, face coverings may be removed as long as you are at least six feet from another individual.
- Conducting work where the hazards associated with wearing a mask (e.g. straps getting caught in machinery, heat stroke, etc.) are greater than the risks with not wearing a mask, if the COVID-19 risk is factored into the job hazard analysis and the controls are identified as part of that analysis are implemented.

- Individuals who have a medical or religious reason why they cannot wear face coverings may request an accommodation, as appropriate.
- While working a load, scheduling or other operations desk in control rooms where social distancing of at least six feet is maintained and additional safety measures are in place.

Masks may only be removed in those specific situations and must be worn at all other times, including in all common areas, hallways and breakrooms and when walking around the facility for any purpose.

In accordance with DOE guidance, unvaccinated people and those who decline to attest their vaccination status must wear a mask outdoors in crowded settings or during outdoor activities that involve sustained close contact with others. Those who are vaccinated are encouraged but not required to wear a mask in similar outdoor situations.

For the latest updates and policies, visit [myWAPA, COVID-19 updates](#)

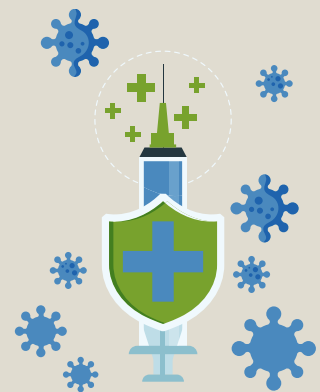


Administrative leave available for family vaccinations

Federal employees can receive up to four hours of administrative leave, per dose, to accompany a family member receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

Federal employees requesting this administrative leave must submit a leave request in ATAAPS following these steps:

- Enter leave requests as Admin Leave (LN).
- In the "Other" field, enter "Admin Leave for a family member to receive a COVID-19 Vaccine."
- ATAAPS may ask employees to duplicate their response under Remarks. If this happens, enter "Admin Leave for a family member to receive a COVID-19 Vaccine" again in the Remarks field.



Brief Transmissions



WITCC Chat hours extended

In June, the WAPA Information Technology Call Center launched WITCC Chat, allowing employees to receive live IT support through a chat function. Much as the phone system does, WITCC Chat queues employees and puts them in touch with the first available WITCC agent.

The success of this initiative has led to the active WITCC Chat hours being extended. The service is now available from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Mountain time. IT will continue to monitor the data and metrics and seek opportunities to continue to improve the service.

Employees may launch WITCC Chat via the yellow chat icon at the bottom right-hand side of the homepage of the IT Service Portal. Access the Service Portal from the green tile on the right-hand side of the myWAPA homepage.

Strategy shares TAP videos

The Strategy Office has published a series of video interviews intended to help employees understand the purpose and value of each Tactical Action Plan initiative.

Five videos in total are available:

- FY21 Strategy Overview, TAP Goal and Metrics Update: Presented by Acting Chief Strategy Officer **Laura Dawson** and Strategy Management Analyst **Mark Getecha**
- Data as a Strategic Asset: Interview with Information Technology Specialist **David Tucker**
- Fiber Partnerships: Interview with Chief Public Affairs Officer **Teresa Waugh**
- Prepare for Markets: Interview with Project Manager **Amy Cutler**
- Human Performance and Just Culture: Interview with Human Performance and Just Culture Program Manager **Krystall Valencia**



Watch the video interviews at [myWAPA, Programs, Strategic Planning, FY performance, FY 2021 performance](#)

